

OPEN AND SHUT?

Monday, April 23, 2012

The OA interviews: Carlos Rossel, Publisher at the World Bank



Carlos Rossel

*"The Bank is committed to sharing our data, knowledge and analysis with others in the search for development solutions. By making Bank research and knowledge products published by the Bank available **libre OA**, third parties are free to use, reuse, and build upon the Bank's work in ways that can lead to innovative solutions to local development problems."*

When **Jim Yong Kim** takes office as the new president of the World Bank on 1st July, he will be the first development professional to head the Bank. That is new. But it is not all that is new at the World Bank. The new president will inherit an organisation that has undergone a lot of navel gazing over the past few years. Its conclusion: the Bank needs to rethink the way it operates.

The outgoing president of the Bank **Robert Zoellick** gave some insight into the Bank's internal deliberations in a **speech** at Georgetown University in September 2010. Significantly, Zoellick acknowledged that pushing top-down economic solutions that were baked in the West on developing countries can no longer be viewed as adequate.

In his **speech** — entitled "Democratising Development Economics" — Zoellick pointed out that "modern portfolio theories" of economics have too often failed to deliver on their claims. The hubris behind such claims, he added, "turned to humility in the 2007 sub-prime crisis that led to the global economic crisis."

To underline his point, Zoellick said, "According to its risk model, one investment bank suffered a loss on several consecutive days that should only have occurred once in 14 life-spans of our universe."

The discrediting of established thinking by the global crisis, said Zoellick, has obvious implications for development economics. In fact, he added, even before the crisis "there was a questioning of prevailing paradigms and a sense that development economics needed rethinking. The crisis has only made that more compelling."

What has become apparent, Zoellick said, is that development economics needs, "to reach out to better encompass the experiences of successful emerging economies not with ordered templates or with blueprints, not with prescriptions for prescriptees, but inquiringly, cooperatively, openly."

Modernisation Agenda

The outcome of the Bank's deliberations was the launch in 2010 of its **Modernisation Agenda** — a move intended to ensure that the organisation was "strategically focused, financially stronger, and more responsive, transparent, and accountable."

The Modernisation Agenda has a number of important implications for the Bank. From the specific perspective of the OA movement, it has seen the formulation of an **Open Development Agenda**, Phase I of which is focussed on providing "openness and transparency in development, from tools and knowledge resources to Bank-wide initiatives."

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The first step was taken in April 2010, when the Bank announced its **Open Data Initiative**. This saw more than 7,000 development indicators — along with more than 60 other datasets — made freely available on its web site; and the amount of data available continues to grow.

Three months later, in July 2010, the Bank launched its **Access to Information Policy** — with the aim of transforming the way in which it makes its data available to the public. As part of this initiative, 17,000 historical documents were released from the Bank's archives.

More recently — on April 10th this year — the Bank announced its plans to introduce an **Open Access Policy**. To come into effect the day the new president takes office, the OA policy will mandate that the Bank's research outputs and knowledge products are deposited in a newly-created institutional repository called the Open Knowledge Repository (OKR), to be made freely accessible on the Internet. The OKR is already **live**, and contains a great deal of data.

In addition, much of the Bank's information will be released under the most liberal **Creative Commons** licence, allowing anyone to reuse it for their own purposes, even commercially. The Bank is the first major international organisation to take this step.

Larger context

But what is striking about the Bank's Modernisation Agenda from the perspective of the OA movement is that it puts OA in a much broader context than OA advocates are accustomed to think of it — since the Bank is going some way beyond simply making its knowledge more accessible.

Zoellick outlined this broader context last week, at the beginning of the **2012 World Bank-IMF Spring Meeting**. Explaining that the Bank is committed to greater openness in a number of ways, he said, “We are continually striving to be more open about **what we know** (data, tools, and development knowledge), **open about what we do** (operations, projects, finances and commitments), and **open in the way we work** (**Open Aid Partnership**, knowledge platforms).”

As such, the Modernisation Agenda couples issues of transparency, accountability, and freedom of information, with concepts of open content, bottom-up collaborative working, crowdsourcing, and even open government.

Consider, for instance, the six “knowledge platforms” the Bank is creating. This includes the **Open Development Technology Alliance**, a knowledge platform on ICT that seeks to use external expertise and citizen feedback to improve public service delivery.

In other words, the Bank is treating OA as more than just a tool to enable faster and more effective knowledge transfer and exchange, but a component part of a platform intended to create democratic, bottom-up, multi-pronged solutions to the many challenges confronting not just the developing world, but mankind at large — e.g. **climate change**.

The Modernisation Agenda is also an acknowledgement that both knowledge creation and economic power are beginning to shift, and to disperse. As Zoellick put it in 2010, “The flow of knowledge is no longer North to South, West to East, rich to poor.”

It is no longer a one-way process, but one that moves in both directions. The Bank also views it as a democratisation — for it implies a process in which knowledge and creativity move seamlessly between the developed world and the developing world, and also between organisations and individuals. And it does this in a more decentralised manner.

For OA advocates the take-away point is that while OA may be an important objective in itself, it should now also be viewed as part of a larger whole. As Zoellick put it at Georgetown University, “We need to democratise and demystify development economics, recognising that we do not have a monopoly on the answers. We need to throw open the doors, recognising that others can find and create their own solutions. And this open research revolution is underway. We need to recognise that development knowledge is no longer the sole province of the researcher, the scholar, or the ivory tower.”

Viewed in this context, and in the context of the developing world, calls for public access to research, for open science, and even for citizen science, take on

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on the state of Open Access: Where are we, what still needs to be done?

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Community Action Publishing:
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We are today seeing growing dissatisfaction with the pay-to-publish model

a new meaning, a new purpose, and a new urgency.

Most important legacy

What impact the Bank's new approach will have on the organisation itself, whether its Modernisation Agenda will prove effective, and whether this more democratic model will enable solutions to the many problems facing humankind to be developed more rapidly remains unknown.

Undoubtedly, changing the culture of a large institution like the World Bank will prove a formidable task. Indeed, the Bank may not entirely understand all the implications of the journey it has embarked on, and many employees of the Bank are doubtless oblivious of the larger picture.

Certainly if it is to live up to its commitment, the Bank will need to reinvent its *modus operandi* – and in a way that most global institutions would find far too threatening. Indeed, one might venture to suggest that the very notion of decentralisation is oxymoronic in the context of a large international organisation like the World Bank.

In short, only time will tell how successful the Bank will prove in its aim of being more open, more transparent, and more democratic, and the extent to which its OA policy will help it achieve this goal. But all credit to the Bank for trying.

Zoellick clearly believes that, if it succeeds, the Bank's Modernisation Agenda will turn out to have been an historic moment for the Bank.

Speaking last week, Zoellick said, "Our modernisation agenda is driven by our focus on clients, listening to their priorities, as opposed to the old top-down approach. So our initiatives for open information, open data, and open access to knowledge may turn out to be the most important legacy of the past five years. These steps are key to democratizing development, and these steps lay the foundation for expanding social accountability, fighting corruption, and building better governance."

In short, Zoellick has bequeathed to his successor not just a new agenda, but a totally new operational model. Whether the new approach succeeds now doubtless depends on Jim Yong Kim – which is an ironic thought given the Bank's new commitment to a bottom-up approach. The task for the new president will be to square that circle!

In the meantime, there remains **no shortage** of critics of the Bank; and no shortage of people keen to **offer advice** to its new president.

For some insight into the part of the Modernisation Agenda that most directly concerns the OA movement, I publish below an interview with the Bank's publisher, Carlos Rossel.



The interview begins ...

RP: *As I understand it, the goal of the World Bank is to help reduce poverty and support development. To that end, it provides loans to developing countries for capital programs. But can you clarify for me how the Bank is funded, and the extent to which that funding comes from the public purse?*

CR: The terms *World Bank*, or Bank, refer to two institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), and the International Development Association (IDA); IBRD, which works with middle-income and creditworthy poorer countries, finances its activities primarily by issuing **AAA-rated** bonds to institutional and retail investors in global capital markets.

IDA, which focuses primarily on the world's poorest countries by providing credits and grants, is funded largely by contributions from the governments of its higher income member countries.

The Guide to the World Bank, available for free download on the Open Knowledge Repository, provides an accessible and straightforward overview of the Bank Group's history, organization, mission, and work.

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Followers

RP: What role does the Bank's publishing programme play in fulfilling its mission?

CR: The [Office of the Publisher](#) works with programs across the institution to capture, edit, produce, and disseminate the Bank's publications as broadly as possible through free channels that include the [Open Knowledge Repository](#), [Google Books](#), [Scribd](#), [Issuu](#), and [Facebook](#), as print publications, via the subscription-based [World Bank eLibrary](#), and as eBooks via the [Kindle](#), [Nook](#), and Apple devices, and through various content aggregators.

RP: The recent announcement that the Bank is introducing an OA policy is the latest stage in what the Bank calls its Open Development Agenda. Presumably, this was the result of a top-down decision originating from the President of the World Bank Group Robert Zoellick. But can you say why the Bank took the decision to become more open?

CR: As World Bank Group President Robert B. Zoellick said in the press release announcing the Open Access policy "Knowledge is power. Making our knowledge widely and readily available will empower others to come up with solutions to the world's toughest problems. Our new Open Access policy is the natural evolution for a World Bank that is opening up more and more."

Response to criticism?

RP: The Bank has been criticised for its information policy in the past. Is its new commitment to openness partly a response to that criticism?

CR: It may have played a part, but my view is that advances in online and mobile communications have created opportunities for making the Bank more open and accessible, for disseminating and sharing our knowledge more broadly, and for communicating directly with our stakeholders, and the Bank is simply seizing those opportunities.

RP: The Bank's previous open initiatives were the Open Data Initiative and the Access to Information Policy. Some would view the Open Data and Open Access initiatives as attempts to create a research environment in which solutions are developed more quickly. By contrast, the Access to Information Policy seems more focussed on freedom of information (Fol) and transparency issues. Does the Bank believe that creating a more open research environment has much in common with Fol and transparency? If so, how would you characterise their common goals and philosophy?

CR: This question is outside my area of expertise so I am not really qualified to respond.

RP: As we noted, the Bank's objective is to aid developing countries. To what extent do you see greater openness, particularly OA to research, as a development issue, and why?

CR: The Bank is committed to sharing our data, knowledge and analysis with others in the search for development solutions. By making Bank research and knowledge products published by the Bank available [libre OA](#), third parties are free to use, reuse, and build upon the Bank's work in ways that can lead to innovative solutions to local development problems.

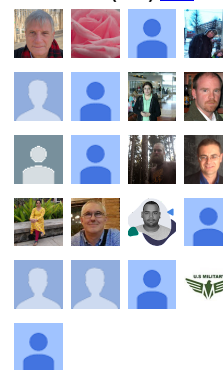
RP: The Bank's OA policy is complicated. Doubtless this is because the Bank is both a knowledge producer and a publisher. Can you say what percentage of its knowledge output the Bank publishes itself, and what percentage is published by external publishers?

CR: Yes, but only anecdotally as we do not have accurate statistics. The Bank publishes a large majority of its knowledge products, both formally and as grey literature. Bank research that is published by third parties, for example research articles published in non-Bank journals, is first published by the Bank as working papers. These working papers are available freely and, with the new policy, are published under the [CC BY licence](#).

Three broad categories

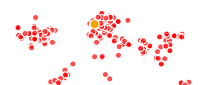
RP: I assume the Bank also publishes third-party content. If so, what percentage of its publishing output is third party content?

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CR: The Bank's publications, research papers, and other knowledge products often include contributions from authors that are not Bank staff. For example, many of our books are edited volumes with chapters authored or co-authored by individuals who are not Bank staff. We do not have exact numbers of how much third party content is published by the Bank.

RP: *Can you give me a (rough) percentage breakdown of the Bank's output in terms of the different types of knowledge it produces – books, data, economic reports, journal articles etc.? And can you put unit numbers on these different outputs?*

CR: The Bank classifies its **core knowledge** into three broad categories: knowledge for external clients, knowledge as a public good, and knowledge for internal use. Knowledge for external clients is usually for a specific client country, although often it will have application in other countries, and includes analytical work, technical assistance and training. Knowledge as a public good is meant for a global audience, for example the **World Development Report** and other publications.

RP: *Would it be accurate to say that only a small percentage of the Bank's knowledge output is peer-reviewed? How much is peer-reviewed?*

CR: No, that would not be accurate. All Bank research is peer reviewed. Other knowledge products that are not research per se are subject to varying degrees of review, which may include stakeholder consultations, internal and external review, review by senior management, and review by the Board of Executive Directors. Some books are published in agile, fast-to-market, more informal series that have less stringent review.

Impact on revenues

RP: *Since the Bank is a publisher, I assume its OA and Open Data initiatives will have an impact on its revenues. Can you say how much the Bank was earning from its publishing operations prior to the introduction of the Open Data Initiative, how much this has fallen as a consequence of that initiative, and how much the Bank expects it to fall in total once the full impact of its OA policy has been felt?*

CR: Revenues have fallen significantly and they will continue to fall. However, we are committed to OA publishing. When the decisions on Open Data and Open Access were made the focus was not on lost revenues but on the cost of not opening our data or adopting an OA publishing model, for our clients and for development.

To the extent that we continue to disseminate through commercial channels it is to take advantage of the added dissemination via those channels and to make the content available to customers where and how they want to access it. So, for example, for some customers the most convenient way to access our content may be to purchase it as an eBook from Amazon and we should facilitate that acquisition.

RP: *In deciding to adopt greater openness how did the Bank weigh the inevitable loss of revenue it will experience against the benefits that this openness is expected to provide? In other words, how did it balance the benefits of becoming more open against the need for its publishing operations to remain financially viable (assuming they are)?*

CR: As noted above, we focused on the cost of not being open rather than the loss of revenues,

RP: *Does the Bank expect to replace its lost revenue with new revenue-generating initiatives, or will it need to make savings. If the latter, how will it make those savings?*

CR: Yes, all of the above, and then some. The fact is that free and open is not free. Some of our budget support will come from charges to our internal author clients (internal Gold OA if you will). Savings are realized through reduced warehousing, fulfilment, and shipping costs, and through a more agile, fast-to-market e-first workflow we are implementing.

Value-added products

RP: *I note that the Bank is retaining a subscription model for its eLibrary. Is that because it could not afford the loss of revenue that abandoning it would entail, or because it views the eLibrary as a value-added product? If the latter, what added value does the eLibrary provide that the OKR will not?*

CR: The eLibrary is a value-added product which is very reasonably priced, and for which we offer free or deeply discounted subscriptions to institutions in developing countries.

In the context of our program's budget, the revenues are not insignificant, but that is not the only consideration. I believe that we need to remain engaged with that segment of the publishing industry, as that is where much of the innovation in digital publishing takes place.

It is also important so that we retain an entrepreneurial edge and our business acumen and so that we continue to provide the Bank an agile, efficient, adaptable, and cost effective publishing program.

A new and enhanced version of eLibrary will be launched later this year that will offer mobile access, allowing even more flexibility for sharing, using, and re-using the Bank's knowledge. The new eLibrary will be XML based and will allow users to access books and reports at a more granular level — such as by chapter, table, or figure.

Among other features, users will be able to build custom ebooks from eLibrary content that can be used as course packs for classroom use, create alerts, bookmark content, and enjoy other value-added functionality.

Mandate

RP: *The heart of the Bank's OA policy is a **Green OA mandate**. I believe the Bank's OA policy also applies to grantees. What sort of funding (and how much) does it provide to whom and for what? And in way will the OA policy impact on those who receive grants from the Bank?*

CR: The Bank does not provide research grants. We included that provision in the policy so that it is covered if there is some ad hoc funding of outside research.

RP: *Unlike the NIH and Wellcome mandates, the Bank's OA policy does not specify an embargo period (other than to say “ideally no more than 18 months”, which is the embargo period for its own two journals). Is this because the Bank, as a publisher itself, understands the anxieties that publishers have about embargos, or for some other reason?*

CR: Although I appreciate the perspective of commercial publishers, the major consideration for now is to not complicate our researchers' ability to publish in external journals, which we believe is a vital channel for our research.

However, I do expect that embargo periods will go down over time and we will revisit this issue in the future.

RP: *So far as I am aware, the Bank never uses the word “mandate” in its descriptions of, and documentation about, its OA policy. Is there a particular reason for that, or did it simply use the same wording as the NIH?*

CR: I do not recall that this was deliberate. We use the word “requires” which in this context I take to be synonymous with “mandate.”

RP: *The Bank is not the first institution to introduce a mandate. What did it learn from the experience of those who have introduced mandates before it, and how did that inform the way the Bank put its own OA policy together?*

CR: In 2010 we conducted a strategic review of the publishing program with the objective of implementing a cutting-edge publishing program that fully embraces free and open publishing. We engaged **Key Perspectives**, a UK consultancy to the publishing industry, to undertake the review.

Their report recommended adoption of an OA policy, the use of CC licensing, and the development of a repository. In addition, in drafting the OA policy we did look at the policies of other institutions, all of which informed our policy.

Creative Commons

RP: *One aspect of the Bank's OA policy that is pioneering is its adoption of Creative Commons licensing. How did the bank arrive at the decision to take this step, what were the issues it considered in doing so, and what are the risks as you see them?*

CR: It was one of the recommendations coming out of the strategic review. The Bank had already opened its data and made it available without restrictions and had implemented the Access to Information policy. Adopting CC licensing was a logical next step in the Open Agenda.

RP: *One thing we have learned about OA mandates over the past few years is that compliance is often pretty low. I believe the Wellcome Trust recently indicated that it is still only achieving a 55% compliance rate for its mandate some six years after it was introduced. Do you anticipate compliance being a problem for the Bank? What systems is it putting in place to maximise compliance?*

CR: A high compliance rate with the policy is one of our top priorities and we are making every effort to support Bank researchers to comply with the policy.

As I noted, the Bank publishes the majority of Bank-authored research and knowledge products (as books, reports, and working papers). We are confident that we will achieve high compliance with the policy.

RP: *The Bank's policy nevertheless allows authors to ask for a waiver (or "exception" as it calls it). The Harvard OA policy allows this too. As I understand it, Harvard has found that some publishers routinely insist that authors ask for a waiver if they want to publish with them. Do you envisage this being a problem for the Bank?*

CR: We are proactively working with publishers to conclude institutional agreements to comply with the policy.

In the case of journal articles, concluding such agreements will make the process smoother, and we expect that our authors and the journal publishers will appreciate a streamlined licensing process. We have started discussions about these agreements with a number of publishers and will reach out to others over the next few months.

RP: *How often does the Bank anticipate that it will grant an exception, and will it grant it automatically?*

CR: I do not anticipate that there will be a large number of requests for exceptions, but time will tell. The cases will be reviewed and decided individually on the merits of the request.

RP: *The Bank's Administrative Manual states that all rights in any work produced by Bank employees belong to the Bank. It also states that the rights in external research funded by the Bank belong to the Bank. It later says that it "strongly encourages" authors to retain the Bank's ownership. I am not clear how an employee could give away copyright in a work in which he or she had no rights. Can you clarify this?*

CR: Strictly speaking, an employee cannot give away copyright in a Bank work unless the Bank releases the copyright to the employee. In exceptional cases the Bank may choose to release the copyright to the author if circumstances make that practical.

Our objective is to provide the authors with the knowledge and tools that allow them to publish externally in a manner that complies with Bank policy.

Gold OA

RP: *I could find only an oblique reference to Gold OA in the Bank's documentation about its OA policy. Many research institutions are creating Gold OA funds, and encouraging researchers to pay to publish. Will the Bank be doing either or both of these things?*

CR: No, the Bank will not encourage researchers to pay to publish and we are not creating Gold OA funds.

RP: Will the Bank be offering a pay-to-publish option itself? If so, how will this operate, and what APC will it charge?

CR: We will not offer a pay-to-publish option.

RP: What in your view are the pros and cons of Gold OA? Do you think it offers a viable model for the future? Do you expect it to become the primary business model for OA publishing?

CR: Academic/STM publishing is crucial to scholarly communication and publishers play a vital role and provide an invaluable service. This service has a cost and that cost has to be borne. Gold OA has a role and I expect funding agencies will support Gold OA.

RP: What advice would you give to other international organisations like the World Bank who might be considering embracing OA?

CR: Well, I don't offer advice to my peers at other international organizations. If asked, I suggest that they get ahead of the issue and drive the move to OA within their organizations.

RP: Can we expect to see the IMF follow suit?

CR: I wouldn't venture a guess at whether or not the IMF will adopt OA.

RP: What advice would you give to those scholarly publishers who are still resisting the OA tide?

CR: We are an institutional, mission-driven publisher, working within the context of our organization and facing a unique set of opportunities and constraints. Scholarly publishers operate in their own contexts and face their own opportunities and constraints. I would not venture to provide advice since I am not familiar with their unique circumstances.

Next Steps

RP: What is the next step in the Bank's Open Development Agenda, and what do you see as the end point?

CR: The Bank will continue to add more data to the Open data portal, release new research and knowledge products in the OKR, and additional documents under its Access to Information Policy.

In addition new products and applications are being launched including, for example, the [Mapping for Results](#) that maps 30,000+ project locations for 1,600 active Bank projects or the [Climate Change Knowledge Portal](#) a hub for climate information.

We will keep tracking [aid flows](#) to present a more complete picture of what money is being committed to development and where it is being spent.

We will partner with others to encourage greater openness in development projects, aid, and in government. The [Open Aid Partnership](#), for example, is seeking to increase transparency through open data on aid flows and public service delivery. Malawi piloted this approach and mapped aid from 27 donors.



Building on its role as a global connector, the Bank is investing in six new Knowledge Platforms to collaborate on solving thorny development problems. For example, the [Open Development Technology Alliance](#), a knowledge platform on ICT, seeks to use external expertise and citizen feedback to improve public service delivery.

Finally, the Bank is helping signatories of the [Open Government Partnership](#) achieve greater standards of transparency and participation through the mapping of public spending.

It is also helping governments implement Access to Information legislation. We have supported the Government of Kenya in launching the first Open Data Initiative in Africa, which made several large data sets, including the national census, available to the public.

RP: Thank you for taking the time to do this interview.

More information on the World Bank's Open Access policy is available [here](#).

Posted by Richard Poynder at [10:14](#)  

Labels: [Mandates](#), [Open Access](#), [World Bank](#)

1 comment:

G. J. G. said...

Great interview, Richard. Thanks for continuing to produce these and make them available. It would be very interesting to see if you could get somebody from the IMF to speak about their data and why they haven't followed suit.

April 23, 2012 7:00 pm 

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